Pharaohs and the Afterlife
The Art of Ancient Egypt
Where is Egypt?
Did you know Egypt was located in North Eastern Africa?
Goals

- Understand the evolution of Egyptian culture and its relationship to the Nile.
- Recognize stylistic conventions of Egyptian art.
- Describe Egyptian funerary art forms from these periods and state reasons for the development of these monuments.
- Understand architectural evolution from pyramid to the tomb temple and burial monuments of the Old and Middle Kingdoms.
- Understand aspects of the Amarna Period as reflected in its art.
Protected by desert on the West and mountains on the East, ancient Egyptian civilization flourished in isolation on the fertile plains along the Nile river.
“Egypt is the Gift of the Nile”

Herodotus, Greek traveler and writer, commented on the mighty Nile River in the 5th century BCE.

The Nile is the world’s longest river. It winds north from equatorial Africa to the Mediterranean Sea.
Egyptian Civilization

Abundant food and water allowed the Egyptians to develop a complex culture.

People were no longer just farmers, but had the opportunity to pursue various professions.

Isolated in a protected environment, Egyptian art and culture remained constant for several thousand years.

Strong belief in an afterlife encouraged the development of a variety of art forms.

With the use of slave labor the Egyptians built massive structures to be used as tombs for the Pharaoh.
Map of Sites in Ancient Egypt
Notice locations relative to the Nile
Predynastic Period

• 5500-3100 BCE
• Time period before the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
• Before the formation of dynasties
  – Members of the same family inherit the throne
• Significant social and political transition
• New style of leadership based on rulers’ claim to be divine
• Surviving art consists mainly of ceramic figures, glazed pottery and stone reliefs
Predynastic Egypt 5500-3100 BCE

Jar with River Scene
Predynastic
c.3500-3400 BCE
Notice the Abstract style decoration
Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt

- About 3100 BCE Egypt became a consolidated state along the Nile with the start of the Early Dynastic period.
- According to legend the country had evolved into two separate kingdoms.
- Upper Egypt in the South and Lower Egypt in the North, near the Mediterranean Sea.
- Ancient documents refer to an Egyptian ruler “Menes king – Menes god,” who conquered Lower Egypt and merged the lands into one kingdom.
Religious Beliefs

• Herodotus believed the Egyptians to be the most religious people he had ever met

• Religious beliefs permeate Egyptian art in all periods

• Rulers were considered divine kings, sons of the sun god Ra
  – They rejoined him after death, riding with him in the solar boat as it made its daily journey across the sky.
  – To please the gods and ensure their goodwill, leaders built beautiful temples and provided priests to maintain them.
Religious Beliefs and the Afterlife

- An essential part of every human being was its life force – the *ka*, or spirit.
- It was believed that the *ka* lived on after the death of the body.
- Therefore, the *ka* needed a body to inhabit during the afterlife (statue or mummy).
- This led to the establishment of elaborate funerary practices and lavish tombs.
Form of the Egyptian gods

• Many Egyptian gods and goddesses were depicted in various forms.
  – Human beings, animals or humans with animal heads
• Osiris, god of the dead, appears as a human wrapped in linen like a mummy.
• Isis, wife of Osiris, is represented as a human.
• Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, is depicted as a having a human body but with the head of a falcon.
• The sun god, Ra, is sometimes portrayed as a cobra, or a scarab beetle.
Early Dynastic Egypt

1st king, Namar
Dynasty 1, ruled 3100 BCE
Palette of Narmer
slab of mudstone, both sides carved in low relief
• Narmer’s name appears on both sides as a pictograph.
  – Picture writing
  – Small square near the top
  – Horizontal fish = Nar
  – Vertical chisel = Mer
• Palettes were flat stones with a circular depression.
• Common utensil used to grind eye paint.
• Palette of Narmer has the same form as these but much larger.
• Probably had a ceremonial function.
• In the top register, Narmer wears the Red crown of Lower Egypt.
• He is now ruler of both lands.
• His name appears twice in pictographs, at the top and near his head.
• Horus stands guard over the rows of dead.
• Intertwining beasts in center could represent the unification of Egypt.
• At the bottom, a bull, powerful symbol of the king, frightens a foe.
• King Namer appears as main character on both sides.
• Images of conquest and power, portray him as the great unifier, protector and leader of Egyptian people.
• Note the hieratic scale
• Important in this very class conscious society
• One this side he wears the White crown of Upper Egypt
• Images are symbolic of Namer’s taming of Lower Egypt
Palette of Narmer - front

- Red Crown of Lower Egypt
- Defeated army
- Sandal Bearer
- Narmer as a bull - trampling enemy & attacking city
Palette of Narmer - back

- Hathor
- White Crown of upper Egypt
- Sandal Bearer
- Papyrus and human head - city of lower Egypt
- Dead enemies
- Horus
Importance of Namer’s Palette

• There is disagreement among scholars about some of the specific meanings of the images.
• However all agree that the images are strong and direct.
• The message of Namer as powerful leader and unifier of Egypt is clear.
• Use of pictographs and symbols is also important.
• Provides an early example of the unique way Egyptian artists solved the problem of depicting the human figure in two dimensional space.
• For 2000 years, royal patrons, like Namer, also wanted strong powerful images to record their achievements.
Egyptian Representation of the Human Figure

- Many of the figures on the Palette of Namer are in impossible poses.
- Egyptian artists used memory images and generic forms to suggest a specific object.
- They wanted to represent each part of the body from the most characteristic angle.
  - Heads in profile, eyes in frontal view, shoulders frontal, but waist to feet in profile
  - Both hands in front of figure and one foot in front of the other on the groundline
- This convention was followed, especially for royalty, for nearly 2000 years!
People of a lower social rank were often portrayed in more natural poses.

There were also conventions, or rules, for portraying animals, insects, inanimate objects, landscape and architecture.
Egyptian Canon of Proportion

- Figures were proportioned in accordance with an ideal image of the human form using a Canon of Proportion.
- Ratios between a figure’s height and all of its parts were clearly prescribed.
- All calculations were based on a single unit of measure, such as the width of a closed fist.
- Egyptian artist would first set out a grid then sketch the figure according to the Canon of Proportion, placing shoulders, hips, knees, etc at the right location.
- The grid would be covered up by the finished paint.
The Old Kingdom Architecture: The Age of the Pyramids

2686-2181 BCE
Religious Beliefs and the Afterlife

- An essential part of every human being was its life force – the *ka*, or spirit.
- It was believed that the ka lived on after the death of the body.
- Therefore, the ka needed a body to inhabit during the afterlife (statue or mummy).
- The ka also needed a comfortable place to live.
- This led to the establishment of elaborate funerary practices and lavish tombs.
The Old Kingdom

- Time of social cohesion and political stability
- Expanding wealth of ruling class was reflected in the size and complexity of their tombs
- Court sculptors created life size and even colossal royal portraits in stone
  - Some of these statues were used as repository for the Ka after a person had died
• **Mastaba**: Most common form of funerary architecture during the Early Dynastic period
  – Flat topped, one story, slanted walls,
  – Erected above an underground burial chamber
  – Usually made of mud bricks with a **veneer**, an outside covering, of cut stone
  – Contained a **serdab**, a small sealed room housing the **Ka** statue of the deceased and a chapel
  – Vertical shaft dropped from the top of the mastaba down to the actual burial chamber
  – A **sarcophagus**, or stone coffin, held the body in the burial chamber
  – One mastaba could hold multiple burial chambers
  – Later Dynasties erected extensive aboveground funerary complexes grouped together in a **necropolis**
Mastaba, Stepped Pyramid, and True Pyramid
Mastaba

Cross Section (left), plan (center), and restored view (right) of typical Egyptian mastaba tombs.
Stepped Pyramid of King Djoser, c. 2681 -2662 BCE
designed by Imhotep, Prime Minister and first known architect in history
Stepped Pyramid of Djoser:

earliest known monumental structure in Egypt
resembles a ziggurat but differs in purpose
stairway to the sun god, Ra, and to protect tombs
originally faced with a veneer of limestone.

Stepped pyramid resembles six mastabas stacked.
Adjacent funerary temple continued to be used for worship of the king, even after his death.
Restored plan (top) and view (bottom) of the mortuary precinct of Djoser, Saqqara, Egypt, Dynasty III, ca. 2630–2611 BCE.

1. Stepped pyramid derived from square-plan mastaba
2. Funerary temple of Djoser
3. Court with serdab
4. Large court with altar and two B-shaped stones
5. Entrance portico
6. Heb-Sed court flanked by sham chapels
7. Small temple
8. Court before North Palace
9. North Palace
10. Court before South Palace
11. South Palace
12. South tomb
13. Royal Pavilion
14. Magazines
Imhotep’s architecture employs the most elemental structural techniques and purest geometric forms.

Most of the surfaces were left plain in some places he added columns.
Some columns are plain except for **fluting** on the **shaft**.

Others like these are resemble **papyrus stalks**.

The **capital** takes the form of a **papyrus blossoms**.

Capitals on the South wall resemble **lotus flowers**, Why?

These columns are called **engaged columns** because they are a part of the surrounding wall.
The Pyramids at Giza

Constructed in the architectural form most associated with Egypt, the true pyramid with a square base and four sloping triangular faces.
Angled walls may represent the sun’s rays. Inscriptions tell of deceased kings climbing the rays to join the sun god.
The first true pyramids, the *Great Pyramids at Giza*, were built in the 4th Dynasty of the **Old Kingdom**.

Pyramid of Menkaura, (foreground), 2,525 BCE;
Pyramid of Khafra, (center), 2,590 BCE;
Pyramid of Khufu (rear), 2560 BCE
Pyramid Design

1. Silhouette with original facing stone
2. Thieves’ tunnels
3. Entrance
4. Grand gallery
5. King’s chamber
6. So-called Queen’s chamber
7. False tomb chamber
8. Relieving blocks
9. Airshafts(?)
• The oldest and largest, Khufu, covers 13 acres at its base, and rises to about 450 feet.
• Originally covered with a thick veneer of limestone that added another 30 feet to its height.
• Khafra is slightly smaller and still has some limestone veneer.
• Menkaura is considerably smaller than the other two.
• The site at Giza was carefully planned to follow the east/west path of the sun.
• Next to each of the pyramids at Giza there was a funerary temple, a causeway and a valley temple on the banks of the Nile.
Reconstruction - Funerary Complex at Giza
The Great Pyramids represent extraordinary feats of engineering. They are built of solid limestone; the blocks were cut with metal tools in the eastern Nile cliffs, marked by stone masons with red ink to indicate their eventual location, floated across the river during seasonal floods, and then dragged up temporary ramps and moved to their final position.
The Great Sphinx
Viewed as benevolent in contrast to the malevolent Greek version.

Thought of as a guardian often flanking the entrances to temples.

Most famous sphinx is the gigantic sphinx at Giza which is part of the funerary complex of Khafra.

Located beside the pharaoh's Valley Temple and the covered causeway that led to the Mortuary Temple.

Sculpted from an outcropping of limestone at the site.

Symbolizes the sun god; but there is much speculation about who the Sphinx resembles.

While it has a god's face, it has a lion's body.

The royal headdress originally included the sacred serpent--but it was shot off along with its nose.

Sphinx has sustained much weather damage in last 4000 years.
Note Location of Sphinx in front of Khafra Pyramid
Location of the Sphinx
actual photograph
Amazing Architects

- The pyramids were massive structures.
- Egyptian architects were capable of the most sophisticated mathematical calculations.
- There was no room for trial and error.
- Foundations had to be absolutely level.
- The angle of each slanting side had to remain constant, in order for the stones to meet perfectly at the top, which they did.
- They accomplished all these things without modern technology.
- How do their skills and resulting accomplishments compare to public building projects today?
The Old Kingdom
Sculpture
A Period of Political Unrest
Old Kingdom Sculpture

- Egyptian sculpture is best described by the terms **cubic and frontal**. The block of stone was first made rectangular; the design of the figure was then drawn on the front and the two sides.

- The resulting statue was intended to be seen mainly from the front. Since it was meant to be a timeless image intended to convey the essence of the person depicted, there was no need for it to be composed in the round.

- The sculptures often did not depict movement; instead, the person was either standing up straight with their arms at their sides or sitting down with their hands on their knees.
The Ka statue of Khafra sits very erect, calm, regal. Horus watches over him from behind.

Lion throne symbolizes the king’s power.

Intertwined lotus and papyrus = unification.

This three-dimensional sculpture is more naturalistic than two dimensional art, yet still rigid.
Menkaura and a Queen
From Giza

2470 BCE
This famous 4th dynasty group comes from the valley temple of Mycerinus, (Menkaura) who built the third Giza pyramid.

Here the pharaoh is depicted advancing arrogantly from the background, beside the goddess Hathor with calf horns and solar disk, and goddess Nefti
Katep and His Wife
2563 BCE
Old Kingdom
Prince Rahotep and His Wife, Nofret
2580 BCE
Old Kingdom Sculptors

• Commissioned to create portraits not only of kings, but also of less important people, like the *Seated Scribe*

• These portraits were less formal, more relaxed than royal portraits.
Seated Scribe
2400 BCE
The statue depicts Ka-Aper, the "first reading priest" who lived in Memphis at around 2500 BCE. The statue is made of a single block of sycamore wood apart from the arms which are attached to the trunk with pieces of wood.
Tomb Decoration

• Created to make the final resting place of the Ka more pleasant.
• Often all walls and ceilings were decorated with paintings and reliefs.
• Much of this decoration was symbolic.
• Could also include scenes of daily life.
• Scenes of momentous achievements.
• Tomb paintings provide a wealth of information about ancient Egyptian culture
Ti Watching a Hippopotamus Hunt
c.2550-2460 BCE
painted limestone

- Found in the Mastaba of Ti.
- 5th dynasty official, commoner who achieved great power and wealth at court.
• Exhibits many conventions of Egyptian painting.
• River is seen from above.
• Creatures in the river are shown in profile.
• Boats skim along the surface of the river.
• Unhampered by the many vertical papyrus plants.
• At the top, where Egyptians often painted background scenes, several animals are seen stalking birds.
• Ti is in the traditionally twisted pose, regal among the chaos.
• The actual hunters of lesser rank are painted more realistically.
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